

Guardian

by thehush

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Summary: After the events of Portal 2, Chell discovers her place was always with Aperture Science and finds a purpose with the shell of what it once was.

1. Prologue: The Path Home

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By Erin (thehush)

Note: You can also find this story at Ao3. Republished upon request.

****Prologue: The Path Home****

The walk back to the Aperture was oddly quiet and comforting. She shouldn't have expected anything different, but she had. She had expected the world to be falling apart, destroyed. Different, at least, what with how GLaDOS warned her it wasn't safe. That it had changed.

Chell held her companion cube tight. It was heavier without the portal gun, but years of training had built up her arm strength. She was glad to have walked so much in the center, as the walk back to the front door of the facility was a long one. Michigan's Upper Peninsula was flawless, beautiful in every way and it showed in the untouched wheat field growing over the salt mine underneath. The fields led into a dense forest and through the forest, after several stops to get used to the fresh air, she found a gated entrance. A parking lot stretched for miles before meeting up with the back door of Aperture Science Laboratories.

Her bracer boots clicked against the concrete as she rounded the gated back parking lot. Over long stretches of grass and a smattering of small trees and wild flowers she was sure had once been manicured

monthly " Chell saw the front entrance of the facility. A small parking lot sat silently in front of the elegant entrance way. The glass walls looked shadowed with grime, vines snaking up over the structure.

A rush of relief washed over her. She had felt an unconscious tug as she had walked, knowing that somehow, she would find the facility in the direction she had taken. Now, she realized she could have run the opposite way. Taken the road that lead to and away from the small parking lot " it was so easy. There would be a tram just a ways down the street. She could go to the garage and hot wire a cart to take her there. She remembers this. She remembers that fateful day when she got up early and rode the tram with her mother and father to show off her science fair project with her elementary friends. They had taken the cart to the door. Spoken to the nice lady at the front desk|

Chell blinked, taking in a deep breath. The memories hurt as they clawed their way to the surface. She listened to the trees move with the breeze and swallowed hard. Outside that road, there was no one waiting for her. She was dead, along with her mother and father. Her family. All she had was Aperture.

Squeezing the Companion Cube, she turned and pushed the automatic doors apart, stepping into the stale building. She was greeted with silence and opportunity.

She was home.

2. Chapter 1: Caroline

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By Erin (thehush)

****Chapter 1: Caroline****

The buildings above the portal laboratories were a maze of halls, elevators, and stairways. Long rooms filled with cubicles. Long rooms filled with computer repair stations. Long rooms made just for meetings.

Chell found posters along the walls that talked about "Bring Your Daughter to Work Day" and old computers she was sure were almost 40 years old, if her internal timeline was right. It was like a museum with empty places where people had escaped the upper crust of the facility. So many people must have been test subjects before her. She hoped enough employees were able to escape. Her parents hadn't. Or had they? Time made memory faulty and she couldn't remember if they had escaped without her or they had become test subjects.

Leaning against the wall of a sunlit hallway, she sighed, tired. How long had it been since she had actually sat down and relaxed? How many days had she been down in the bowels of Aperture? She felt old and yet, it all felt as if she had visited yesterday.

Chell moved away from the wall and started back down another hallway, peeking into each room to see what she could find. Eventually she came upon a room full of robot parts. At first they looked like dead

bodies, which startled her, until the setting sun revealed their faces " pale peach plastic with holes for eyes, nose and a mouth. She neared them and studied a woman's body. It looked as though someone had been working on her right when GLaDOS had put the lock down on the facility. She was almost done; all she needed were clothes and features.

"Would you like me to help you finish her?" a voice suddenly asked.

Chell squeaked, instinctively pointing towards the voice before she realized she didn't have the portal gun. A familiar face looked embarrassed.

A robot-woman with a wig of black hair that hung over her shoulders and a short blue work dress held up her hands to cup her forehead, embarrassed. "Oh, I'm sorry, I forget how long it's been since anyone has been here."

"Ca" Caroline?" In the doorway, Cave Johnson's successor stood before her, noticeable robotic, but lacking the stiffness she was expecting. "But, you're" dead" _and_ deleted!"

Her small laugh sounded metallic and far off. "GLaDOS couldn't delete me if she tried. It would be like deleting herself. She did, however, isolate me so I wouldn't get in the way of her testing."

It shouldn't have surprised her that GLaDOS would want to make sure no one could disable her so easily again " but she had only been gone a few hours or so. "That" was really fast."

Caroline nodded. "She was _very_ eager to make sure the personality cores didn't bother her again."

Chell studied her face, fascinated by the idea that Caroline was more a person again, and less of a memory. Suddenly, even in the low light, she realized the robot had purple eyes. "Oh, you're the Morality Core. That one never talked" and I thought I destroyed it."

Coming closer, the robot smiled. "No, you just took away its physical existence. All personality cores are backed up in a way that not even GLaDOS can delete them. Without the cores, or myself, GLaDOS would cease to exist."

"That's amazing" She neared the woman, making sure not to stare. "Have any of the other cores been placed in robotic form?"

"She just built me; I've been given full control of a robotics assembly line, so I can build them as I please. I will be taking control of the facility and its regular functions while she controls subject testing and test subject creation. She's very excited and I'll be glad to be around people again" in a sense."

They looked at each other in silence for a long time, not sure what either should say. It had been years since either had had contact with another person and finding the words to say anything was harder than either of them thought.

Chell finally got out: "Can I stay?"

Caroline gave her a small, relieved smile. "Of course, I know you have nothing else out there. It's not safe either. I think it would be better if you stayed under our roof, but I'll be happy to make sure you are given every opportunity here."

Chell laughed softly to herself. "Well, if it's okay with you, I think I could go for some of those potatoes now."

"Good, I'm starting to run out of room for them. Follow me." Caroline turned and headed out of the room.

Potatoes from everywhere in the facility were being gathered, cleaned, and stored in several vats (fresh off the robotic assembly line) in the main break room of the facility. It had been quite a process, what with all the roots needing to be burned off of surfaces and the large "mother" potato having to be moved from Chell's ancient school project and placed in isolation. Caroline had already started creating a habitat for it so she could have fresh food to eat if they couldn't figure out how to get modern food back into the facility fast enough. They had talked about pulling up old Aperture logs for food delivery, but it was on the list of things to do.

And there was a lot to do.

First, though, Chell needed a home of her own " which for someone who had become used to roughing it, was easy enough. They decided on a CEO's office at the top of the facility. One that had a wall of windows that looked out towards the setting sun and a wall lined with view screen panels. With a look of satisfaction, Caroline told her to enjoy the view while she put the facility to work.

It surprised her how many types of robots there had already been outside of the ones she had seen in the testing facility. Caroline called on maintenance and delivery bots, ones she was sure had been used in place of humans to save on paying for manual labor. They quickly cleaned the room, vacuuming the old blue carpet and scrubbing the walls and windows. They fixed the view screen before she could protest and it blinked to life, two panels displaying the news while several others showed old Aperture videos. She muted them, ignoring the strange images the news displayed. She really had been out of the world for too long.

The delivery bots brought up a bed from stasis, its mattress having been cleaned and the stasis tech taken out of its insides. Then the metal frame was made and put together before she could even turn around. Blue Aperture sheets, with the company logo, were set aside as a dresser was placed across from her new bed. A bot folded and stacked clean clothes from all over the facility. Most were orange jump suits, but others were clothes left by those before her. Plush chairs and a pair of couches were rushed in and set in front of the view screens, tables of all sorts appearing before she realized she now had both a small bedroom and living room in a matter of minutes.

As everything settled, Caroline showed her how to work the view screen controls " which also controlled the lights, the shutters, and delivery and maintenance robots. The lamp beside her bed suddenly glowed to life, the lights overhead fading. Chell felt sleepy. She blinked, trying not to succumb to her forgotten exhaustion, but

Caroline smiled softly again and nudged her towards the bed, now made.

"Go on, you deserve to get some rest." She said, touching the control panel to close the blinds.

Chell felt as if she was being lazy, having not been able to do anything while they worked. "I dunnoâ€¦ I should helpâ€¦"

The robot shook her head, smiling again. "You have helped us beyond our ability to ever repay you. You need to sleep. When you wake up you can do whatever you please, but let us work tonight. It will be safer that way."

Chell sat down on the bed, and then let herself sink down into the mattress. It had been so long since she had lain down to sleep without the help of stasis. The last thing she saw as her eyes grew heavy was a delivery bot carrying in her repaired companion cube and setting it beside the bed. Caroline took a seat on the couch as well, and she drifted off to the low hum of the newsâ€¦

End
file.